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## PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC POLICY REFORM IN AFRICA

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Africa's poor socioeconomic performance during the 1970s and 80s, and the resulting hardships for the continent's inhabitants, have been well documented and analyzed (e.g., World Bank, 1994a and 1989; Chole, 1989).<sup>1</sup> In comparison to the rest of the developing world, the 80s for Africa have been termed a "lost decade," where both rural and urban populations ended up worse off by 1990 than ten years prior. Although international attention has focused largely on stories of African calamity—such as Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, and Zaire—not all the news is bad. In some countries—for example, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, South Africa, and Zambia—economic and political reforms have begun to bear fruit, which has led to renewed hope that Africa's decline can be reversed. As the trends toward increased economic and political liberalization evolve, African decision-makers and the international donor agencies that work in Africa are interested in the nature of the linkages between economic reform and political liberalization, and in how these twin trends can support and reinforce each other. An issue central to both trends is participation, which has enjoyed something of a policy renaissance over the past several years.<sup>2</sup> This paper reviews the literature that addresses participation in economic policy reform in Africa. It explores two basic premises: that the circumstances surrounding participation and the ways it occurs

influence the economic policy reform process, and that changes to enhance participation can lead to improved policy outcomes.

Participation is an extremely broad concept, one that has over the years enjoyed what Cohen and Uphoff, writing nearly fifteen years ago, called "popularity without clarity" (1980). That characterization still applies today, with perhaps even more salience than ever on the African continent as the trend toward more open forms of government and an expanded role for civil society continues to grow. International assistance agencies, academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and developing country counterparts have debated and discussed the definitions, roles, aims, and utility of participation in various fora over the years (see Nagle, 1991). We define participation along three dimensions that accommodate a range of activities, actors, and actions. This framework adapts earlier work done on rural development project participation (see Cohen and Uphoff, 1980) to the larger sphere of policy reform, and looks at participation in terms of:

- **What:** the steps in the policy process—analysis, design/adoption, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

- **Who:** the categories of key actors in the policy process.
- **How:** initiative for reform, incentives for participation, institutional mechanisms, extent of participation, and degree of empowerment.

## I. PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC POLICY REFORM IN AFRICA

The literature on participation in policy reform falls into three broad categories.<sup>3</sup> The first category, technical economic performance perspectives, contains analysis of structural adjustment programs, and focuses on how participation fosters or impedes appropriate policy choice and achievement of economic performance targets. Sources here include case studies of individual country performance with policy reforms and multi-country cross-case analyses (e.g., Abbott, 1993; Berg, 1990; Husain and Faraqee, 1994; Liebersohn, 1991; Mills, 1989; Thomas et al., 1991; Vondal, 1989; Zulu and Nsouli, 1985). This category's orientation to participation is on its contribution to getting the policies right.

The second category, political economy, contains several streams. A large literature addresses the nature and role of the state, and the implications for participation (e.g., Boye, 1993; Callaghy, 1990; Lemarchand, 1992; Sahn and Sarris, 1992; Shaw, 1993; van de Walle, 1994). Numerous authors analyze the impacts of interest groups on policy outcomes (e.g., Gulhati, 1990a and 1990b; Krueger, 1993; Skalsnes, 1993; Toye, 1992; Widner, 1993), including individual country cases (e.g., Chazan, 1983; Herbst, 1993; and Rothchild, 1991 on Ghana; Bates and Collier, 1992; and Kydd, 1989 on Zambia; Kiondo, 1989 on Tanzania). Other authors look at NGOs and the private sector (e.g., Bienen and Waterbury, 1989; Bratton, 1989b and 1990; Shaw, 1990), and at participation of civil society in the policy process (Rothchild and Chazan, 1988; Wunsch and Olowu, 1990). Another stream contains authors who see participation in terms of the relative power distributions between the international financial institutions and individual countries (e.g., Fearon, 1988; Good, 1989; Schoenholtz, 1987). A sub-stream of African analysts focuses on the roots of political economy in indigenous cultural patterns and practices (e.g., Ake, 1990; Ayittey, 1990 and 1991; Etounga-Manguelle, 1991; Heilbrunn, 1993; Tadesse, 1992). Literature in this category can be characterized as emphasizing

participation's place in getting the politics of policy reform right.

The third literature category looks at the institutional and management dimensions of participation and policy reform. Major emphases here are on institutional capacity, both as a constraint to participation in the policy process and an area for technical assistance (e.g., Hirschmann, 1993; Lamb, 1987; Sutton, 1987); civil service reform and the role of bureaucrats in policy change (Brown, 1989; Garvey, 1991; Leonard, 1991; Montgomery, 1988); management tools and techniques that can help deal with interest groups (Brinkerhoff, 1991; Crosby, 1992a and 1992b; Grindle and Thomas, 1990; Robinson, 1990; White, 1990a and 1990b); and the institutional requirements for effective participation of civil society in policy reform (Bratton, 1989a; Hyden, 1990; Talbott, 1990). African public administration specialists constitute a sub-stream of literature in this category (e.g., Balogun and Mutahaba, 1989; Kiggundu, 1989; Mutahaba et al., 1993). The viewpoint here can be summed up as concentrating on linking who participates and how to getting the institutions right for effective policy reform.

### A. What Kind of Participation?

Participation in policy analysis and design has, in general, been relatively restricted by both weak African policy analytic capacity and lack of demand. Numerous sources cite the low level of technical analytic skills as an important constraint to African participation in policy dialogue (e.g., Commonwealth Secretariat, 1990; Gulhati, 1990b; McCleary, 1991; Mutahaba and Balogun, 1992; Nunberg, 1990; Paul, 1990; Sutton, 1987). The capacity constraint diminished during the 1980s as a result of training and increased experience (World Bank, 1991), but indigenous demand for policy analysis remains limited. The political economy literature notes that in many cases African leaders have been little interested in technical arguments for or against policies, being more concerned with regime maintenance and political survival (Bienen, 1993; Crook, 1990; Evans, 1992; Hyden, 1992). This factor is also mentioned in explaining why leaders pursued economically irrational policies in the first place. In authoritarian regimes, the conduct of independent, critical policy analysis has been discouraged, thus limiting the growth of independent analytic capacity. Increasing indigenous demand for

policy analysis is seen as one way to increase African ownership for policy reform (World Bank, 1991; Johnson and Wasty, 1993).

Regarding policy design/adoption, the impact of donor procedures and timetables is frequently noted (McCleary, 1991; Nelson, 1990). The design process is usually conducted by a small technical team and a closed circle of national actors (Gulhati, 1990b). Institutional constraints limit African technocrats' effective role in the process (Gulhati, 1990a; Mutahaba and Balogun, 1992). In many countries, decision-makers have seen little need to consult elements of civil society beyond symbolic, tightly managed opportunities for popular ratification of policy choices already made, although political liberalization is modifying this pattern somewhat (Hyden and Bratton, 1992; Nyang'oro and Shaw, 1992). However, policy designs that build political support for reform measures are more successful than those that do not (Corbo and Fischer, 1990; White, 1990a and 1990b). Participation in policy design is expanding via a range of consultative mechanisms, such as: national conferences (Heilbrunn, 1993; Sall, 1989), social marketing (Corbo and Fischer, 1990), involvement in polls and surveys (see Atherton et al., 1992; Monga, 1994b; Vondal, 1989). Sources agree that participation is more likely in democratizing countries (Hyden and Bratton, 1992). Botswana is cited as exemplary in this regard; Molutsi and Holm (1992: 82) note that, "top officials have come to believe that government programs work better if the public can be induced to participate ... in governing processes. The Government has sought to obtain popular consent for specific programs through public consultations" (see also Picard, 1987; Wiseman, 1990).

All the streams of literature stress participation in implementation as having the most influence on the achievement or failure of policy objectives. The recognition that, in practice, policy implementation is not simply a mechanical process of carrying out measures decided upon previously is in large part responsible for the blurring of the boundaries between the steps in the linear policy process model and its recasting in terms of an interactive, multidirectional frame (see Brinkerhoff, 1991; Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Kulibaba and Rielly, 1993; Thomas and Grindle, 1990; White, 1990a and 1990c). Participation in policy implementation can be divided into two categories: participation by implementing agents and by groups that are the

target of reforms. Regarding the former, the literature notes the issues of capacity, civil service reform, and the need for a stronger state apparatus to implement policies even if the role of the state in economic activity is reduced (Berg, 1990; Callaghy, 1990; Nunberg, 1990; Silverman, 1995).<sup>4</sup> State agents are often seen as obstacles to policy implementation, viewed as (at best) captives of vested interests, or (at worst) the predatory personification of the abusive state apparatus, driven by the desire to maintain elite control over public resources for rent-seeking and patronage purposes (see, for example, Rothchild and Chazan, 1988; Garvey, 1991; Lemarchand, 1992). But, as Grindle points out (1991), bureaucrats are not always simply the sum of the preferences of their strongest patrons/lobbies; some are sincerely interested in reform, as Leonard (1991) illustrates in his study of the careers of four African civil servants.

Regarding participation by reform targets, their impact is greater in long-haul reforms than stroke-of-pen ones (Healy and Robinson, 1992; Nelson, 1989a; Bienen and Waterbury, 1989; CSIS, 1992). Successful implementation over time highlights the importance of coalition-building among key stakeholders. Hawkins (1991), for example, credits the failure to build such coalitions as a major contributor to the demise of Zambia's economic reform program under Kaunda (see also Bates and Collier, 1992; Callaghy, 1990; Gulhati, 1989). Participation here is of two types: voice and exit. Formal voice options are: participation in national conferences, rallies, and other organized fora (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992; Ouane, 1990); policy/program review committees (USAID, n.d.); information dissemination campaigns and/or the media (West and Fair, 1993); through NGOs and other voluntary associations (Widner and van der Veen, 1993). Informal voice includes: spontaneous protests, rumor campaigns, one-on-one meetings with officials. Exit reflects such actions as: withholding support, non-participation in services or policy benefits (Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin, 1987), boycotts, retreat into the informal sector (MacGaffey et al., 1991), evasion of policy provisions through bribery and side-payments (Bates and Krueger, 1993), and migration (Kom, 1993).

Participation in policy M&E is relatively limited. There is not much M&E in inward-looking public sector agencies, and thus M&E capacity needs to be developed (Brinkerhoff, 1991; Kiggundu, 1989; Wiesner, 1993; White, 1990a). Participation in

policy impact surveys and reviews is one way of involving target groups in M&E (Atherton et al., 1992). Civil society can serve an important governance function here as an independent watchdog; this is a role for NGOs, the media, and universities (see Charlick, 1992; Fowler, 1991; Wedell, 1986).

## **B. Who Participates?**

The participation of national government personnel is critical, since they are frequently the major actors in the policy process (see Evans, 1992; Rondinelli and Montgomery, 1990). Sources note their capacity to subvert policies, the fact that bureaucrats are often beholden to special interests (Callaghy, 1989; Johnson and Wasty, 1993), and the weak institutional structures national staff operate within (see Sahn and Sarris, 1992; Wunsch and Olowu, 1990). International donor agencies are also key players, and their participation is critical to initiating reforms and determining reform targets and conditionalities (Beckman, 1992; Healey and Robinson, 1992; Nelson, 1990). The private sector is often the target of reform efforts (Bienen, 1990; Young, 1991). The sector falls into two groups: formal and informal. The former is small, urban, male, and protected by close links to state (Gordon, 1991). The latter is large and rural, contains many women, participates minimally in the policy process, but tends to be responsive to policy changes (Gladwin, 1991; Kulibaba, 1993a and 1993b).

NGOs are the subject of a large literature (see Edwards and Hulme, 1992). They are important as interest aggregators, and play a mediating role between the state and individuals (Clark, 1991; Fowler, 1991; Shaw, 1993).<sup>5</sup> International NGOs are a lobbying force, and operate in some African countries too. Besides NGOs, African civil society contains other, diverse associational groups (Bratton, 1989a). Though not recognized by the state, there is a significant amount of informal participation by people in a wide range of horizontal voluntary associations (Chazan, 1992b). Bates' now classic study (1981) points out the fallacy of the assumption that rural Africans were largely quiescent and disengaged from policy-making due to their geographical dispersion, low socioeconomic status and the rigors of agrarian life. He argues that the extent of agrarian organization was a consequence of whether there were large farmers with a special stake in more favorable policy; whether the loyalty of

larger, more militant farmers could be co-opted through selective administration of subsidies, and whether or how much heads of state and political elites derived personal income or support from rural constituencies (see also Bates, 1988). Similar conclusions can be drawn about other interest groups, underlining the fact that absent opportunities for formal participation in the policy process, stakeholders devise their own subtle yet effective means of exerting influence on policy outcomes. As Colbourn (1989) notes, strategies of non-compliance (including foot dragging, feigned ignorance, false compliance or sabotage) provide a means by which groups in civil society (e.g., rural farmers) can "critique" policy, without drawing the wrath of the authorities (see also Ela, 1992).

Experience with this kind of participation constitutes an important source of social capital, which can be tapped for reform (Améthier, 1989; MacGaffey et al., 1991). With political liberalization, civil groups and the media are more vocal, putting pressure on African governments for change (Monga, 1994a). Local residents, the poor, and other disenfranchised groups have very limited direct participation in reform (Ela, 1992; Mikell, 1989). The poor, however, are a topic of discussion by others regarding the impacts of adjustment (Jolly, 1988; Lele, 1986 and 1990; Sahn, 1990; Sarris, 1990; Taube, 1993).

## **C. How Does Participation Take Place?**

The impetus for reform is often donor-driven. The perceived need for reform by African leadership is linked to crisis situations, where the urge to reform develops as a function of the elimination of other options (e.g., Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Krueger, 1993; Kulibaba and Rielly, 1993; Mosely et al., 1991). Political liberalization in many countries, however, is accompanied by popular demand for economic liberalization, so it is too simple to say that reforms have been forced on Africa by donors. In fact, the actual process of negotiating and implementing reforms involves a large degree of joint initiation of proposals and counterproposals (Berg, 1990 and 1991; Brinkerhoff and Morgan, 1989; White, 1990c).

Incentives for participation are related to the classic interest-maximization principle, where the motivation to participate is a function of groups seeking to advance their interests (see Liddle, 1992).

The uncertainty and complexity of policies, though, can make identification of interests difficult (Bates and Krueger, 1993). Key variables, therefore, in determining incentives for participation are: a) how different groups perceive the policy and its impact on them, and b) how they define their interests as they relate to the policy and its impact. A common conclusion regarding adjustment policies and governments' ability to sustain commitment to measures agreed to is that reform costs are immediate and clearly hurt key constituencies while benefits are diffuse, uncertain, and take a long time to be realized (Bienen, 1990; Johnson and Wasty, 1993; van de Walle, 1994). Some authors suggest strategies for addressing this pattern of incentives. For example, based on the Zambian reform experience, Hawkins (1991) offers four possible strategies that could help to deal with winners and losers: repress opposition, appeal to patriotic sentiment, promote new constituencies among winners, and/or make short-term transfer payments to loser groups.

Institutional structures for participation have traditionally been dominated by the state and a coterie of privileged elites, but governments are facing new demands for accountability and transparency from vocal civil society (Hyden, 1992). Weak capacity constrains the effectiveness of the public sector, but a revised role for the state offers institutional space for civil groups to participate more broadly in reforms, for example, through NGOs and/or legally recognized local-level associations (Chazan, 1992b; Rothchild and Chazan, 1988; Widner and van der Veen, 1993). The potential extent of broader participation is limited by policy type. More opportunities exist in long-term reforms, such as privatization (Bienen and Waterbury, 1989) or natural resources policy (Brinkerhoff, 1995), than in what van de Walle (1994) calls "price-based policies" (e.g., exchange rates) where there is little scope for participation beyond a small team of donor and national technocrats in the finance ministry and the central bank.

Regarding the degree of empowerment available for participants in the reform process, popular protest is often cited (e.g., Monga, 1994a), but this is not the only mechanism for voice. Other options include, for example, lobbying, policy dialogue, and media campaigns, all of which can be used to bring pressure to bear on politicians and policy-makers. While visible and vocal outbursts in opposition to

specific policy effects may cause governments to seek tactical policy adjustments in the short-term (see Bratton and van de Walle, 1992b), long-term empowerment of groups to participate in the policy-making process in liberalized systems is strongly related to their ability to translate economic demands into political ones, something that the urban middle class is better positioned to do than the rural poor (see Woods, 1992). Bratton (1990: 89) states that the challenge for the 1990s is, "how can the poor majority reach the makers of public policy?"

## **II. DOMINANT THEMES IN THE LITERATURE**

As the above overview makes clear, the participation literature is vast and relatively diverse. This section singles out a set of topical areas that emerge from the literature as dominant themes and issues. These are grouped into three categories.

### **A. The Political Economy of the African State**

The state provides the principal context in which participation occurs, determining the kinds of contributions that civil society can make to policy reform and implementation.<sup>6</sup> Initially, authoritarian regimes were thought to be more able to cope effectively with implementing unpopular economic stabilization measures. Numerous studies have investigated the link between regime type and reform success (see, for example, Bates and Krueger, 1993; Haggard and Kaufman, 1992; Greenaway and Morrissey, 1993; Lindenberg and Devarajan, 1993; Sirowy and Inkeles, 1990). However, they find no clear relationship between regime type and success in economic reform, although democratizing regimes offer more opportunities for participation in policy reform than do authoritarian ones. Most participation is largely informal, with interest groups able to influence policy decisions by petitioning "their" representatives in government to act in their favor.

Policy-making in this context is limited to a closed elite circle (Gulhati, 1990b), is relatively arbitrary, and lacks the rationality and empirical content characteristic of technically-based policy-making (Hyden, 1992). This closed process creates a kind of "black market government," with parallel structures of persuasion and influence that guide economic policy, but which are neither publicly acknowledged nor formally sanctioned. Studies by Ziegler (1978),

Péan (1983), Smith, Combeaud and Moutout (1990), and Smith and Glaser (1992) focus on the influence of private interests on policymakers, noting how the patterns of interlocking mutual interests create policy distortions that favor elite personal and commercial interests. Opening up the policy process is also difficult because the African state has traditionally guarded information jealously, but transparency is vital to policy debate and consensus-building for reform. In many countries, civil society's demand-making capacity is growing, thus some increases in transparency can be expected (Landell-Mills, 1992).

## **B. Donor Participation in Reform**

Donor participation is strong, particularly in the analysis and design stages of reform, but good design of technical policy prescriptions is not enough (White, 1990a). Reform success requires education and consensus-building, negotiation and compromise, and active reform "marketing" (e.g., Thomas et al., 1991; World Bank, 1994a; Waterbury, 1989). Donor procedures are cited as inhibiting country participation in the policy reform process (Mosely et al., 1991; Toye, 1991), although local officials and technicians can be valuable participants in reform design and initiation. This situation is changing for the better as some donors are modifying their practices and procedures to incorporate participation more broadly and easily (see Atwood, 1993; Bhatnagar and Williams, 1992; USAID, n.d.; Vondal, 1989; World Bank, 1994b).

Policy-based aid is a mixed blessing for African governments (e.g., Winter, 1984). The access to quick-disbursing financial mechanisms to meet emergency expenditures is desirable, but engages leaders in a process that risks dismantling the instruments that assure their power base (White, 1990c). For donors, the mechanistic prescriptions of adjustment are ostensibly apolitical. Yet if those prescriptions are implemented, they are certain to have political outcomes (Cohen et al., 1985). This technical orientation, accompanied by the avowedly apolitical nature of reform prescription, often leaves donors without explicit strategies for dealing with the political reservations of African decision-makers. The problem of conflicting views and agendas can be further compounded by the absence from the negotiating table of key stakeholder groups whose compliance with or opposition to reform is ultimately critical (Brinkerhoff and Morgan, 1989; Crosby, 1992b). Country cases show elaborate strategies for

non-compliance, raising issues about commitment to reform (Johnson and Wasty, 1993; Kulibaba and Rielly, 1993). Conditionality can induce initiation of reform, but is not an effective tool for enforcing compliance or sustaining change (Berg, 1991; Hermann, 1986; McCleary, 1991; White, 1990c). Interestingly, the reasons governments give for failing to meet conditionalities are often participation-related: the need for consultation with stakeholders, election calendars, democratization timetables, public unrest and insecurity, the need to train bureaucrats and other government agents, and the need to educate the public about reform rationale. Although such reasoning is often legitimate, it is also sometimes little more than game playing (Berg, 1991).

## **C. Institutional Capacity for Participation in Policy Reform**

The literature stresses the need for sufficient capacity on the part of the institutions involved in the policy process in order for participation to take place. This capacity is linked to: a) quality of leadership, b) capacity of the government bureaucracy, and c) the nature of the interaction among leaders, bureaucrats, and external actors (Gulhati, 1988). Regarding leadership, in Africa where systems governed by personal rule are more commonplace than other regions, leaders take on a particular importance. The absence of institutionalized checks and balances in the postcolonial state has allowed the African leader to control closely who has access to resources and decision-making (Adamolekun, 1988; Obasanjo and d'Orville, 1991). The role of national leaders stands out in several country cases of economic policy reform; for example, Rawlings' remarkable achievements in Ghana's economic recovery produced one of the few success stories of adjustment in Africa (Chazan, 1992a; Jeffries, 1991). Malawi's Banda and the Ivory Coast's Houphouët-Boigny, on the other hand, held off deep institutional reform while preserving pro-business approaches to development (Harrigan, 1991; Pryor, 1990; Widner, 1993). In Tanzania, Nyerere's charisma and commitment to African socialism created an ideological atmosphere that stifled progress toward market reforms, which only became possible upon his retirement (Bierman, 1988; Campbell, 1992; Kiondo, 1989).

Although national leaders can create a favorable climate for reform, they are not the major actors in

the day-to-day implementation of economic policy. Senior technocrats are. If available from among this pool, a "policy champion" can enhance the chances of reform success by: organizing constituencies for reform, convincing leaders of the need for reform, overcoming bureaucratic barriers, and mitigating public outcry (see Leonard, 1991; Rielly, 1993; Rondinelli and Montgomery, 1990). Such superstar participants in the policy process are in short supply, however. Donors sometimes end up competing for the same pool of committed, technocratic talent to fulfill the policy champion role.

On the subject of public sector capacity, bureaucratic systems suffer from acute capacity weaknesses: inability to deliver even the most basic services, tendency of civil servants to extract rents and/or take second jobs as salaries slip below subsistence levels, inappropriate and ineffective organizations for managing public services, low personnel competence levels, and failure to use appropriate technologies and management techniques (Lamb, 1987; Silverman, 1995; Wunsch and Olowu, 1990). On the one hand, these bureaucratic systems need to be strengthened; but economic stabilization measures often call for reductions in the civil service at the same time that ambitious structural adjustment programs impose new challenges on public sector (Balogun and Mutahaba, 1989; Mutahaba et al., 1993).

Compounding the capacity problem is the fact that the number of participants in the economic policy reform process is large (Thomas and Grindle, 1990; Toye, 1992). Oyugi (1994) illustrates this complexity in the case of policy implementation in Kenya. Because of the interlinked nature of long-term reform measures, and the increasingly recognized importance of sequencing (e.g., Thomas et al., 1991), reform progress risks being limited by the capacity of the policy management network's weakest member(s). This situation can provoke a "snowball effect" of delays, where one missed deadline leads to a cascade of postponements, deferrals, and suspensions. In the pressured environment of adjustment, the response of donors and recipient governments is often to devise makeshift interim modifications, and accept pro forma compliance with targets and conditions in order to keep tranche disbursements on track, a situation Berg (1990) analyzes in Senegal.

Regarding the interaction among leaders, the bureaucracy and external actors, increasing access to

policy debates raises the possibility of more numerous and potentially conflicting demands being placed on decision-makers and administrative systems, and increases the risk of alienating supporters. For example, increasing information flows and transparency can reveal the points of corruption where government resources are diverted through patronage to supporters and/or used to extract rents, thus calling into question the legitimacy and probity of the regime (van de Walle, 1994). In many African countries, however, ruling elites have to some extent been overtaken by events; liberalization has pushed governments to be more responsive (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992). As a function of these changes, issues arise about the capacity of civil society to participate in the policy process. These deal with the demand side of participation in policy, as a complement to the supply side relating to government institutional commitment and capacity to cope with participation by external actors (see Landell-Mills, 1992; Mbembe, 1993). Much attention in the literature focuses on the capacity of NGOs to aggregate interests effectively and communicate to members, politicians and policy-makers (Bratton, 1989b and 1990; Chazan, 1982; Fowler, 1991; Shaw, 1990). For example, NGOs can help rural residents channel their view into national policy debates if the NGOs have sufficient technical expertise in the policy area, basic managerial skills, a willing constituency, and a recognized track record (VanSant, 1989). The institutional strengths and weaknesses of the media are also critical given the centrality of information flows to a participatory policy process (West and Fair, 1993; Zaffiro, 1993).<sup>7</sup>

### **III. KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

This final section presents our major findings and conclusions, synthesized from the literature reviewed. The section concludes with the identification of areas of continuing debate and issues calling for further analysis and research.

#### **A. Participation and Successful Policy Reform**

Regarding the premises our study explores, the general findings are, first, that the pattern of participation does generate impacts upon the policy reform process, but that those effects can be complex

and closely intertwined with political and governance factors. Second, increased participation appears to enhance prospects for sustainable policy reform outcomes, but creating opportunities for participation and managing the process over time are exacting tasks for reformers. The following specific conclusions emerge:

- No single regime type is optimal for reform success. However, democratizing regimes offer more numerous and varied opportunities for participation than authoritarian ones. Similarly, many types of institutions, associations and media offer suitable fora for debate, negotiation, and consensus-building.
- Reform is not a mechanistic process and cannot be implemented by fiat. Reform is interactive, requiring negotiation, modification of views, compromise, concessions and management of risks. Even stroke-of-the-pen reforms require public education and political marketing. The key to success is the ability of government and stakeholders to forge consensus, deal with opposition, and develop reform strategies and sequencing that soften negative impacts for the most vulnerable while increasing the chances for intended long-term benefits.
- A society rich in social capital and associational life provides numerous channels for interest articulation and participation. However, broader participation becomes more likely when affected groups can translate their economic interests into political pressures.
- More participation in policy reform leads to better technical content in policies. Involvement of well-trained technocrats and informed stakeholders enriches the reform process and grounds reform prescriptions in local realities.
- More participation leads to greater sustainability because more affected interests can be included, but also to greater uncertainty. Governments are more willing to pursue reforms when their concerns about the political risks are addressed, and donors need to find ways of helping governments to overcome these concerns.
- More participation is harder to manage, and requires a flexible, strategic approach. This calls for new management skills and institutional capacities.

## **B. Techniques for Promoting Participation in Policy Reform**

To support increased participation in the reform process, new analytic approaches and tools are called for. The results of our study suggest the following:

- Better political and institutional analysis will help to anticipate policy blockages and problem areas. Analysis should be an ongoing part of implementation as well as input to policy design, and African policy managers need to be central participants in these analytic exercises.
- A collaborative design process that integrates implementation considerations into policy content builds participation and increases sustainability. Collaborative design fosters consensus, and increases technical efficiency.
- The technical content of reforms can be redesigned to increase opportunities for participation; e.g., matching grants, revenue-sharing mechanisms, development foundations; or design of the M&E component, where research centers and/or local NGOs can be built in as participants in data collection on policy impacts.
- Institutional capacity-building is needed as a complement to reform. Policy champions are important but can't singlehandedly overcome ingrained institutional weaknesses. Targets of capacity-building are not just public agencies, but include NGOs, private sector groups, political parties, and the media.
- Reform is uncertain, and so is participation. Contingency planning is needed with more flexibility, openness to "mid-course" corrections in implementation, and less reliance upon pre-identifying targets and fixed disbursement triggers.

## **C. Ongoing Debates and Research Gaps**

The existing literature provides a rich base of experience and lessons for addressing the issue of participation in policy reform. However, the swiftly changing sociopolitical and economic dynamics in today's Africa are characterized by complexity and uncertainty. Much remains to be understood and investigated in the search for policy prescriptions



and practical recommendations. The following questions need to be addressed:

- Does the policy reform process operate more effectively when policy implementors are insulated from political forces or when they are subject to some type of “sunshine” mechanism that builds in transparency (e.g., public hearings, open committee meetings)?
- What is the relationship between political liberalization and economic policy reform? Political liberalization, in and of itself, will neither eradicate the influence of corruption and self-interested regimes nor ensure the harmonious interplay of competitive interests.
- What is the most appropriate balance between political and economic reform over the short term? Both external resources and country commitment are required to find the best mix. Further understanding is needed to bring to bear the wealth of existing indigenous institutional capital and to formalize policy space to facilitate its use.
- How can civil society be most usefully integrated into the policy process? Increased participation by external groups calls for a facilitative environment, but how to create one is the subject of differing views.
- Much of the literature focuses on how politics drives economics and reform. Individual cases suggest that this view is too deterministic. The interplay between politics and economics needs more clarification, particularly in terms of how economic and policy variables affect politics.

## **NOTES**

1. This paper is a summary version of a longer IPC report written by the authors for USAID's Bureau for Africa and delivered at the Meeting of the Special Program for Africa (SPA) Working Group on Economic Reform in the Context of Political Liberalization, March 27-28, 1994, Brussels, Belgium.
2. The head of the U.S. Agency for International Development affirmed the centrality of participation in USAID policy and procedures and established a working group on participation (Atwood, 1993). Similarly, the World Bank set up a learning group on participation that has commissioned numerous analyses of participation, held several conferences to discuss findings and their policy implications, and issued a summary report, which concludes with recommendations on "mainstreaming" participation in Bank activities (see World Bank, 1994b).
3. Our study limits its inquiry to participation in the economic policy reform process in Africa. This choice ruled out the vast literature on political and electoral participation, except as it relates to economic development. In addition, the study did not delve in-depth into the huge literature on project participation and community development. Further, the study takes an instrumental focus on participation, concentrating on literature that discusses what participation contributes, or doesn't, to the economic reform process. Thus, the review de-emphasized the literature whose major orientation to participation is in terms of human rights, cultural authenticity, moral imperatives, and so on. Within the bounds of participation in economic policy reform, the study takes a perspective on participation that is broadly descriptive. This approach avoids attempting a specific definition of participation, which can lead to muddy, unresolvable debates over whether a specific instance of participation is "authentic" or "genuine" (and therefore good), or "false" (bad).
4. The requirements of stabilization and adjustment policies call for more, not less, government, leading to what Callaghy (1990) terms the "orthodox paradox."
5. For some, NGOs are key to redefining development in terms of community empowerment, local control, and sustainability (see for example, Korten, 1990).
6. A vast body of literature discusses the nature of the state in sub-Saharan Africa, most of it in the political economy stream cited earlier. Chazan et al. (1988) define the state as "a set of associations and agencies" that exercises control over defined territories and their populations through decision-making structures (executives, parties, parliaments), decision-enforcing institutions (bureaucracies, parastatal organizations, and security forces) and decision-mediating bodies (primarily courts, tribunals, and investigatory commissions). This perspective is useful in that it places emphasis on the organic functioning of institutions.
7. As Zaffiro observes, "to study the press and broadcasting [in contemporary Africa] is to unavoidably and deeply enter the realm of political and social policy analysis" (1993: 7). West and Fair echo this perspective: "political decisions made by African governments have precluded decentralization or democratization of mass media forms such as newspaper or radio" (1993: 98).

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